

As so often happens, Disraeli himself can be quoted in support of either theory. In a reply he made to his critics in the second part of the novel, he anxiously explained that he had been conscious from the beginning of the moral obliquity of his hero.

I conceived the character of a youth of great talents •whose mind had been corrupted, as the minds of many of our youth have been, by the artificial age in which he lived. . . . In his whole career he was to be pitied; but for his whole career he was not to be less punished. When I sketched the feelings of his early boyhood, as the novelist, I had already foreseen the results to which those feelings were to lead ; and had in store for the fictitious character the punishment which he endured.¹

This statement appears explicit enough ; but it was written a year later when Disraeli was suffering from ill-health and the depression that attends it, and when for the moment he had lost his native buoyancy and self-confidence; and if that be remembered, the explanation ceases to carry conviction. To no reader of the earlier chapters of *Vivian Grey* would it ever occur that the purpose of the novel is to unfold the moral lesson of the consequences to which ambition uncontrolled by moral principle must inevitably lead. The author's sympathies are obviously with his hero, and the reader's sympathies, whether he will or not, are enlisted on the same side. The author no less than the reader may be intellectually aware of the hero's imperfections, but even when the action is well advanced there are few signs of moral reprobation. The catastrophe when it comes is a mere matter of machinery, and hardly affects the *ethos* of the story ; it comes only, one feels, because the story had to be ended somehow, and a satisfactory ending was hardly to be found. But we have testimony from Disraeli himself which is more convincing than an apology framed while he was still smarting from the wounds inflicted by the critics. Seven years later he wrote in a diary which till after his death was probably never seen by any eyes "but his own : « Poetry is the safety valve of my passions ¹ *Vivian Grey*, Bk. V., Ch. 1.

